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Six Sculptures from Mahoba

BY

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SIX SCULPTURES FROM MAHOBA.

THE sculptures described in this article were found near the Kīrat Sagar tank, at Mahoba in the Hamirpur district of British Bundelkhand by some labourers, while digging on an isolated little mound in the midst of low-lying fields, owned by Rai Bahadur Pandit Sheo Charan Tewari, one of the richest landholders in the neighbourhood. The discovery was reported to Government by the Collector of Hamirpur and the sculptures were subsequently acquired for the Provincial Museum at Lucknow on the recommendation of the Superintendent, Hindu and Buddhist Monuments, who has also kindly supplied to me some of the photographs reproduced in this note. Mahoba, originally known as Mahotsavanagara, is associated in its rise and fall with the well-known dynasty of the Chandēllas of Jējākabhukti. Brahmanical and Jaina sculptures have long been known among the ruined shrines of Mahoba, but the first clue to the fact that Buddhism also flourished here until the 11th or 12th century, was supplied by the discovery of a stone pedestal inscribed with the Buddhist formula in letters of that period. (Cunningham, *Archl. Survey Report*, Vol. II, p. 445.) The present find gives still more tangible data for the study of mediæval Buddhism in Bundelkhand. These sculptures are some of the best specimens of later mediæval art and offer a vivid contrast with the lifeless productions of the contemporary Buddhist school of Magadha, as also with the numerous stereotyped examples of local Jaina artists. In some respects, the artists prove themselves superior to the older artists of the Sārnāth or Mathurā schools, for example, in the delineation of the perfectly placid features of the face, of the graceful pose of the body, and in the faultless mechanical execution. Indeed the statue of Siṁhanāda-Avalōkitēśvara is likely to take rank among the finest examples of Indian sculpture.

The inscriptions on the pedestals of two of the images, though undated, can be assigned on palæographic grounds to about the 11—12th century A.D. It is evident, that the artists mentioned in the inscriptions on two of the images are not only the donors of them but also the sculptors who carved them; and it is likely that these sculptors lived in the time of Kīrtivarmman, one of the greatest of the Chandēlla rulers, who reigned at Mahoba during the

latter part of the eleventh century and who built the Kīrat Sagar lake, in the vicinity of which the sculptures were discovered. Unlike the black marble used in most of the sculptures from Mahoba, the stone used in this case is the buff-coloured sandstone, of slightly different shades, which comes from the Vindhyas, similar in appearance to the familiar variety from the quarries of Chunar, used by the Sārnāth sculptors, but in this case most probably coming from one of the isolated offshoots of the Vindhyas, so common in Bundelkhand. The stone is capable of receiving a fine polish, as may be seen from the statue of Siṁhanāda-Avalōkitēśvara.

1. (Plate I *a*.) Statue of the Bōdhisattva Siṁhanāda-Avalōkitēśvara (ht. 2′ 8″; breadth 1′ 10″) seated in the *Rājalīlā* (princely ease) posture, with the right knee raised and the right hand resting over the knee and loosely holding a rosary [Sanskrit, *akshamālā*]. Beneath the Bodhisattva is a cushion on the back of a gaping lion sitting on a lotus seat and looking up towards the Bodhisattva. The left hand of the deity rests on the cushion behind the left knee and holds the stem of a lotus-flower. Behind his right hand is a trident (Sanskrit *triśūla*) with a cobra entwined around it. His hair is twined in long curls some of which fall on either shoulder and the rest are coiled in a high mitre-shaped head-dress, decorated with scroll ornament and a crest-jewel. The ear-lobes are elongated and the eyes extended at the corners. The expression of the face is one of perfect serenity and composure. The upper part of the body is partly covered by a scarf, one end of which passes over the left shoulder. The lower garment reaching only to the thighs, is highly decorated; while a garland worn in the fashion of the Brahmanical *yajñōpavīta* is the only one of the 13 ornaments, which are generally found on Bodhisattva statues,—quite a remarkable fact about this interesting image.

The slab at the back of the figure bears a lotus-shaped halo behind the head of the Bōdhisattva; and on either side a pilaster, with a miniature shrine in front containing an attendant with folded hands, perhaps a *gandharva* in flight. The spire of the little niche or shrine illustrates clearly how the stupa of old, with its spire of umbrellas, was gradually evolved into the tower of the modern temple, while the square basement, at first solid, was gradually turned into the image sanctum. (*Vide* Longhurst: *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* Vol. XII, p. 7 ff.)

An inscription on the cushion seat in characters of about the eleventh century A.D. reads thus: (Pl. II *c*).

chitrakara Śrī-Sātanas-tasya putraḥ
sakala-śilpa-vidyā-kuśalaḥ Chhītnakas-tasy-eyam||chha||

Translation.—This (image is the gift) of Chhītnaka, the son of the illustrious Sātana, a painter (*chitrakara* by caste) and completely well-versed in the science of all arts.

2. (Plate I *b*.) Statue of Bōdhisattva Avalōkitēśvara (ht. 2′ 2″; breadth 1′ 1½″) known as Padmapāṇi, seated on a lotus seat in the *rājalīlā* posture. His left hand is placed on the cushion behind the left thigh, and the right makes a mystic sign with the elbow resting on the right knee. The left hand holds

the stalks of a lotus, while another lotus with a long stalk rises on the other side of the deity. The head-dress is similar to that of Siṁhanāda in the preceding sculpture, while the halo is oval-shaped and ornamented with a lotus pattern. The expression of the face is composed and placid, perhaps more natural and pleasing than that of the preceding sculpture. The ornaments and garments are complete as usually found on the representation of a Bōdhisattva (including armlets, anklets, bracelets, wristlets, ear-rings, three neeklaces, two girdles and two garments). At the left extremity of the base is a kneeling figure, evidently the donor, while the lotus throne is supported by three other figures. Below these in niches we notice figures of an elephant, two lions and two human figures, all possessed of a symbolical significance.

3. (Plate I *c.*) Image of the Buddhist goddess Tārā (ht. 1′ 9″; breadth 11″) in reddish buff sandstone; seated on lotus seat (Skr. *padmāsana*) held by *gandharvas*, in *vajrāsana* posture with crossed legs. The left hand is in *vitarkamudrā*, and the right in *varadamudrā*, the former holding the stems of a lotus, which must be the blue lotus (Skr. *nīlōtpala*) of which we notice another flower to the right of the goddess. The right hand holds an uncertain object, possibly a *vajra*. The usual ornaments of Buddhist deities are complete. Along the top of the back slab are arranged tiny figures of the five Dhyāni-Buddhas in all the different attitudes. To the left of the goddess is a seated female figure, probably a repetition of herself. The figure on the opposite side cannot be identified.

The pedestal bears an inscription (Pl. II *d*) in characters of the 11th century A.D., which reads :—

Chitrakara-Śri-Sātanas-tasya va(ṁ)[1]*dhūkasya iyam*||*chha.*||

Translation :—This (image is the gift) of a relation (?) of the illustrious Sātana, a painter.

The goddess appears to be Sitā Tārā, but some of the details as the five Dhyáni-Buddhas are unique in this sculpture.

4. (Plate I *d.*) Image of Gautama Buddha (ht. 2′ 8″; br. 1′ 9″) seated in *padmāsana*, with the upper left portion of the background broken off. The right hand is in the earth-touching attitude (*bhūmisparśa-mudrā*) while the left holds the upper garment, of which the hem appears over the left shoulder. The hair is treated in conventional curls, the ear-lobes are elongated and the *ushṇīsha* is protuberant on the top of the head. The legs are crossed and the palms of both the feet are turned outwards. As usual on statues representing the Buddha, there are no ornaments. Below the cushion seat appear, in niches, an elephant, two lions and two *gandharvas* supporting the seat, and four other figures, two of which are bearded.

On either side of the main figure are worshippers in devotional attitude with their heads turned towards the Buddha. Above the worshippers are quaint-looking animals on either side, with the faces of lions but with long ears and horns. The triple halo at the back is broken at one corner. It has at the top a *kīrtimukha*, and at the upper right corner a semi-divine being, probably

[1] Mr. Y R. Gupte takes this to mean, 'of the daughter-in-law of Sātana.'

a *gandharva*, with the feet of a lion and a curious tail, holding a *vaṁsi* or bamboo flute in his hands, and standing on a crocodile with a gaping mouth.

This is the only sculpture out of the group described here which has not reached the Museum. The owner is unwilling to part with it, and has kept it in an unsheltered niche in the compound wall of his garden.

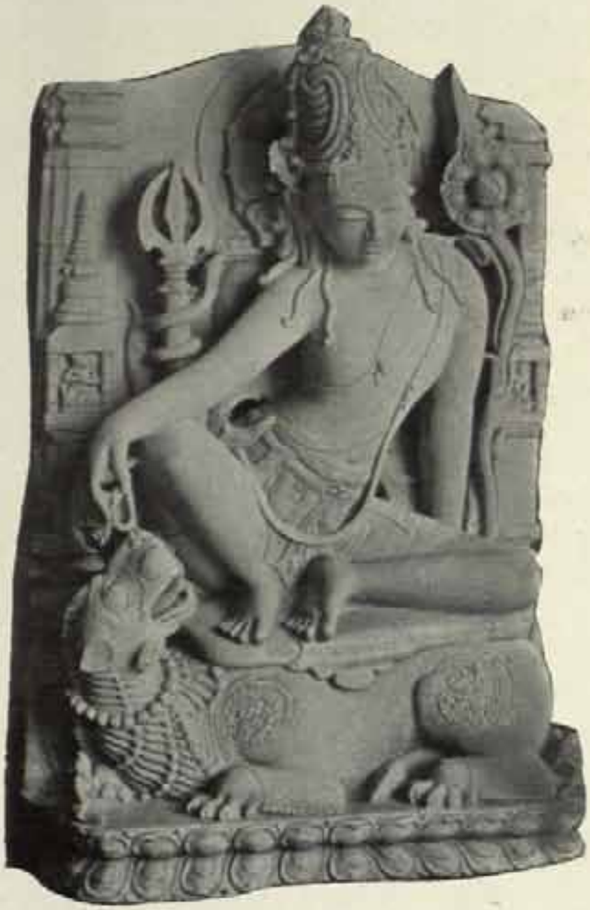
5. (Plate II *a*.) Upper fragment of the back-slab of an image (ht. 1′ 3″; br. 2′ 2″) consisting of a cinque-foil arch with three miniature shrines, one in the centre and one each at either end, with figures seated cross-legged in them. On either side of the central shrine are flying attendants holding streamers, with scroll ornaments at either end. At the extreme ends of the fragments are attendants over crocodile heads.

The spires of the little shrines in this case, clearly illustrate their origin from bell-shaped stupas of the early mediæval period, as the drum and dome separated by horizontal bands, the *hti* or *harmikā* with its polygonal plan and the umbrellas at the top—in fact all the component parts of a stupa—can be distinctly made out.

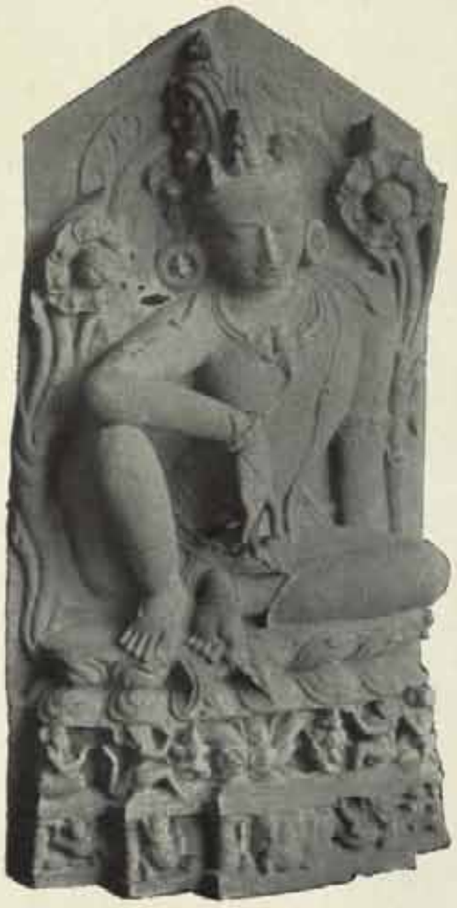
6. (Plate II *b*.) Upper fragment of the back-slab of an image (ht. 9⅜″; br. 2′ 1½″) consisting of an arched background with an ornamental border, and three shrines containing kneeling and seated figures as in No. (5). On either side of the central shrine we notice flying attendants holding streamers, and the crocodile heads can be traced on the edge.

K. N. DIKSHIT.

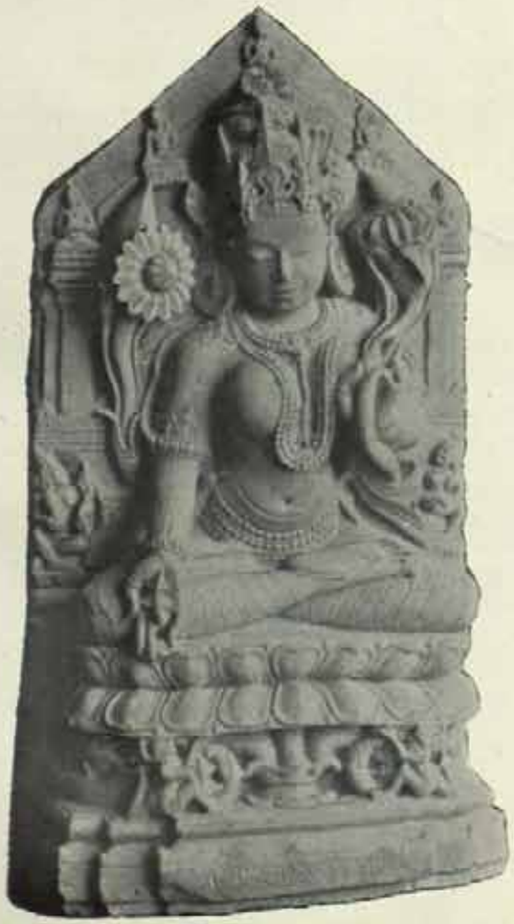
SIX SCULPTURES FROM MAHOBA.



a. BODHISATTVA SIMHANADA—AVALOKITESVARA.



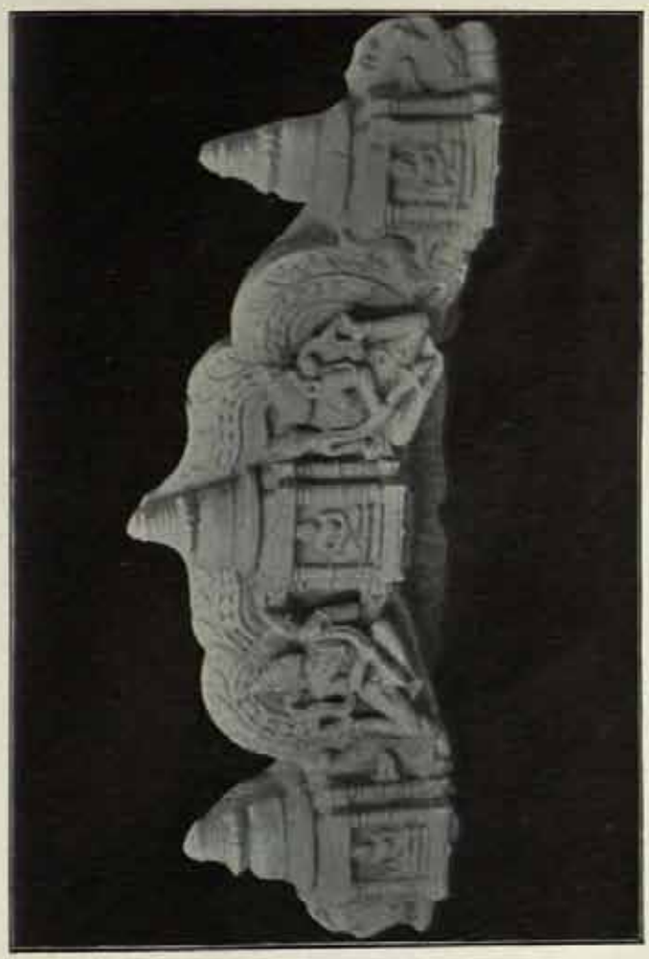
b. PADMAPANI AVALOKITESVARA.



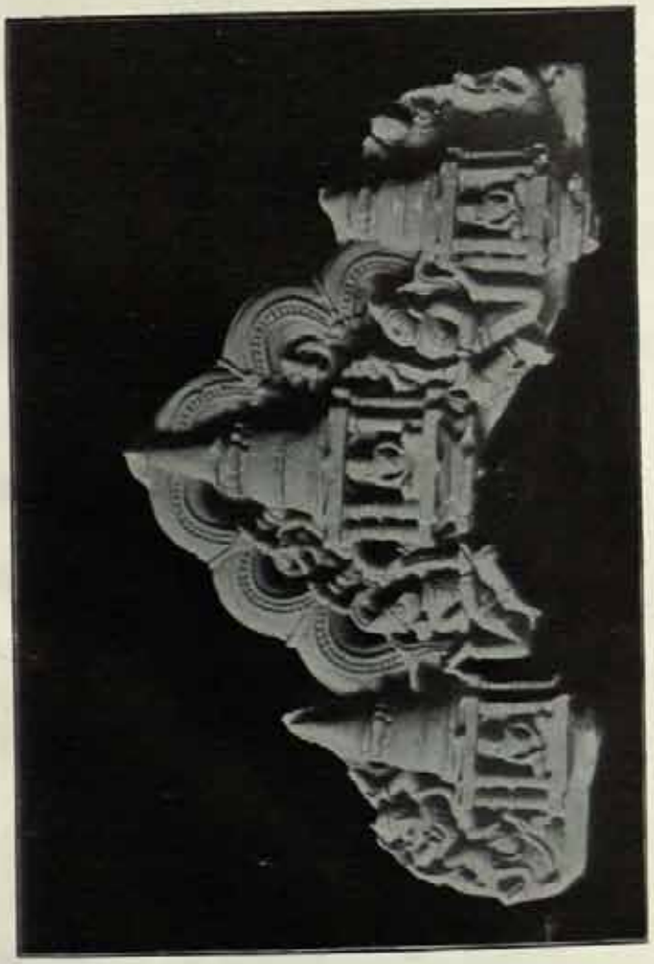
c. TARA.

d. GAUTAMA BUDDHA.

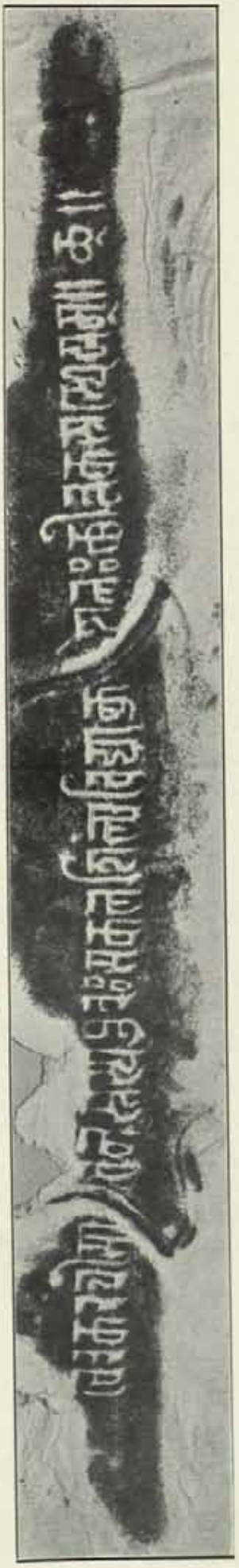
Photo-engraved & printed at the Offices of the Survey of India, Calcutta, 1920.



b. Fragment of the backslab of an image.



a. Fragment of the backslab of an image.



c. Inscription on the pedestal of the statue of the Bodhisattva Simhanada—Avalokitesvara.

d. Inscription on the pedestal of the image of Tara.

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